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Kentuckians put modern twist on sculpting wool

By **Byron Crawford**
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The Courier-Journal



**Byron
Crawford**

"Farming is a lifestyle that feeds your soul. You wake up in the morning wanting to get up rather than having to get up."

-- *Lanette Freitag, Lan Mark Farm*

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Lanette Freitag's transition from corporate America's mahogany row to an office in an aged barn -- where an orphaned lamb nibbles at her sleeve -- has been nearly as comfortable as one of her elegant woolen stoles.

When she was a child growing up in Columbus, Ohio, Freitag often spent summers with her paternal grandparents on a farm in Estill County, Ky.



Lanette Freitag and her husband, Don Bowles, are raising an orphaned Cotswold lamb called Missy and will one day use her wool. (By Byron Crawford, The Courier Journal)

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Although a computer programming career led her up the corporate ladder to management of computer systems and programming for a large corporation in Battle Creek, Mich., her heart was still on a farm in Kentucky.

"I couldn't get it out of my blood," she said. "We went from two acres in New Jersey to 26 acres in Nebraska, and had a 110-acre farm in Michigan."

Freitag and her husband, Don Bowles, now reside on a 350-acre farm at the eastern edge of Bourbon County. They tend about 150 Angus cattle and enough sheep, llamas and alpacas to keep half the county fashionably warm through the coming football and Christmas seasons.

"I always had an interest in having a product that was sustainable from the farm -- something that we could grow on the farm and sell retail -- so that we were involved in the whole life cycle," said Freitag.

With help from the Kentucky Science and Technology Company, the couple's business, Kentucky Wool, is helping redefine an industry that arrived with the first settlers.

Streamlined production

Bowles, who is also a former corporate executive, believes that he and Freitag have developed a process of sculpting wool that will streamline production of designs and patterns. They have applied for a patent and have built a prototype "dry felting" mechanism that will enable wool producers and artists to sculpt and blend fibers faster and more creatively.

"You have to be innovative," said Bowles, whose split black walnut buttons accent some of his wife's designs.



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The couple's woolen hats-to-wall-hangings creations and their wool kits for home hobbyists are sold at their farm, through select gift outlets and online. An agri-tourism grant will help build an addition to their wool-processing operation in the old tobacco barn and will enable them to begin regular large-scale tours of the farm soon.

"That section of the county has been dependent on tobacco for a cash income for many years, and they've gotten some assistance from the tobacco master settlement trust fund," said Bourbon County cooperative extension agent Glenn Mackie. "It's taken some thinking and some imagination, but they seem to have developed a pretty good market."

For more information about Lan Mark Farm go to www.kywool.com or call (859) 383-4560.

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